DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 430 933 SP 038 515

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TITLE	Using Letter Writing To Engage Experienced Teachers in Curriculum Theory.
PUB DATE	1999-02-17
NOTE	26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (Chicago, IL, February 13-17, 1999).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Electronic Mail; Elementary Secondary Education; Graduate Study; Higher Education; *Letters (Correspondence); Student Attitudes; *Teachers; Teaching Methods; *Writing (Composition)
IDENTIFIERS	*Curriculum Theories

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a letter writing approach to teaching in which K-12 teachers in a course on curriculum theory identified and developed their reactions to readings in the field of curriculum theory. Students were asked to use e-mail letters to react and respond to some aspect of the assigned readings for the week. They exchanged their letters among each other and brought copies of their letters to class for small group discussions. At two points during the course, the professor conducted a brief evaluation by asking students to write how the course worked for them and to consider what they had done so far. Several students commented about letter writing. The students reported liking the letter writing activity for a variety of social and intellectual reasons (e.g., getting to know other people and their views, receiving feedback, and reflecting on what they had read). All references to the letter writing activities were positive. In a subsequent curriculum theory class, the professor used letter writing again, but changed how it fit into the course evaluation. Once again, all references to letter writing in the evaluation were positive, and it was mentioned much more frequently. (Contains 13 references.) (SM)

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ED 430 933

Using Letter Writing to Engage Experienced Teachers in Curriculum Theory

[Part of a Symposium on "Innovative Approaches to Teaching Graduate-Level Curriculum Courses"]

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Presented at the
Annual Meeting of the
Association of Teacher Educators
February 13-17, 1999
Chicago, Illinois

SP038515

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While many faculties of education are reconsidering master's degree study and reformers are recommending radical programmatic changes (e.g., Blackwell & Diez, 1998; Tom, in press), little attention is being given to the teaching approaches university faculty routinely use in these graduate programs for experienced teachers. All too often, this university teaching is didactic and abstract, not the model of learner-centered instruction being advocated for our public schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 1998). How can we expect learner-centered instruction from K-12 teachers if such learner-centered instruction is not modeled by those who teach these experienced teachers?

In this paper, I discuss a "letter writing" approach to teaching in which K-12 teachers identify and develop their reactions to readings in the field of curriculum theory. Writing letters encourages experienced teachers to become personally involved in curriculum theory and helps them make sense of the abstractions so characteristic of this field. In this way, university instruction for experienced teachers[1] becomes both learner centered and more meaningful and concrete.

The Idea of Letter Writing

Letters are a well established mode of communication, and I used to associate letter writing primarily with informal communication. Thus, I may think its time to write a letter to my sister in Seattle, more likely an email. Letters, of course, can also have a quite formal and professional purpose, as when I

fashion a job application letter or prepare letters of reference for a doctoral student. Political communication too is often written. If politically agitated, I may write a letter to the editor of the newspaper. Then, there are letters for personal concerns. When irate about the slowness with which an insurance claim is settled, I compose a scathing letter of complaint to my health "provider."

For me, letter writing did not escape its personal, professional, and political purposes until I read a colleague's manuscript about using letter writing dyads as an alternative to journal writing. Jane Danielewicz (1997) observes that her undergraduate students often resist journal writing as "a deadly chore, an added responsibility, or an inappropriate demand to reveal personal information." Writing letters to a partner, however, addresses several of these problems. Each writing partnership constitutes a social relationship. Instead of writing for a grade, students write to fulfill their partner's expectations, and they feel compelled to read the class assignments so that they are prepared to write something. As compared to journaling, Danielewicz finds that students who prepare letters are less inclined to direct their writing to the teacher. Rather, the audience is a specific peer, a person to whom ideas and feelings can be expressed.

In her use of letter writing, Danielewicz is especially interested in engendering student motivation, clarifying the

issue of the writer's audience, and developing student voice. These three issues are typical concerns for composition teachers (e.g., Fulwiler, 1997; Reiss, 1995; Sewell, 1980, 1982; Wahlquist, 1988), the only field in higher education where professors express much interest in letter writing. Composition teachers, moreover, do not try to influence other academic areas to employ letter writing. Rarely do composition teachers -- Reiss (1995) is an exception -- even bother to argue that letter writing might be a way for university students to learn complex academic content.

Letter Writing in My Curriculum Theory Class (1997).

Shortly after my reading of a draft of Jane Danielewicz's manuscript, I began to teach a course on curriculum theory. The four books which I selected for the spring of 1997 covered a range of topics, including a text on current conflicts in curriculum (Beyer & Liston, 1996), a volume grounded in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), a volume of essays on curriculum theory and history (Kliebard, 1992), and a reader of articles on critical pedagogy, articles which were originally published in the Harvard Educational Review (Leistyna, Woodrum, Sherblom, 1996).

"In seminar fashion," I told the students in the course syllabus, "we will jointly explore the ideas in these curriculum books. Depending on the size of the seminar, we may spend a fair amount of time in small groups, and we may be using email to

share reactions to the books and to our class sessions." Since the class had 17 students, I frequently did employ small group activities and discussions, and we did some emailing about course readings over a class listserve. I also decided to experiment with letter writing in the spring of 1997.

From the beginning, letter writing in my curriculum theory class has been a loosely structured activity. I suggested that students use their letters to react and respond to some aspect of the assigned readings for the week. I quickly ascertained that graduate students -- that spring, most were doctoral students -- did not need a precise prompt for their writing. However, the discussions which followed the trading of letters were substantially more interesting and provocative if students had written about the same essay or a common set of chapters. Otherwise, the small group discussions evolving from trading letters tended to be fragmented and superficial.

Students brought several copies of their letters to class. With electronic communication, letters could have been traded prior to class, but many of my students -- particularly the part-time ones -- lacked easy access to email. Moreover, something important would be lost if a person did not hand a partner a letter and in return accept a letter. A sense of anticipation always seems to precede the actual trading of letters, and students immediately start to read the partner's letter. Actually, I discovered that groupings of 3-4 students worked

better than dyads, both to increase the variety of ideas expressed in the letters and to initiate a more complex dialogue in the discussion which ensued after letters were traded.

Over the first six weeks of class in January and February of 1997, I used the letter writing activity several times. To stress that this activity was student oriented, I did not collect any copies of the letters. (As a result, I do not have any examples from that semester to illustrate the typical style and content of the letters.) The way I learned about the content of the letters was to circulate among the various groups during the discussion which followed letter trading and monitor the interchange. Usually, I let small group discussions get started before I walked around the room, a very large room with plenty of space for groups to spread out. Once groups started to talk, I found that my observation made little impact on a group, but walking around at the very beginning of the discussion period seemed to tilt attention toward me and often made the group a bit uneasy with my presence. I learned to kill a little time until the discussion of letters was launched, either occupying myself with paperwork at my seat or walking down the hall to get a coke.

At the end of class on February 6, I conducted a short evaluation, in large part because this was the first time I had taught the curriculum theory course. Individually and anonymously, students were asked to write "how the course is working for me" and to consider "what we've done so far --

letters, large group discussions, and readings" (from a student who wrote down my oral query). Six (of the 15) responding students chose to comment about letter writing, and one person wrote the evaluation in the form of a letter. In the letter, this person wrote about "enjoying the letters as much for the opportunity to get to know a classmate as to express my ideas," clearly a social motivation and different from my interest in letter writing as a way to foster the comprehension of complex ideas. Another student thought more about letters as I initially did: "Writing always makes me think more deeply about what I've read."

Three students suggested both a social and an intellectual purpose:

> Letter writing has allowed me to really learn about another person's views and has given me a chance to share my own in a personal way.
>
> I also liked the letter writing activities (not so much the activity as the opportunity to discuss something in depth one on one).
>
> I have found the letter writing exercise to be effective for making me reflect and initiating the sharing of ideas.

The power of letter writing approach may depend in part on this merging of social and scholarly motives, at least for some students.

While supporting the letter idea, the sixth student gave me some pedagogical advice. That person suggested using a "round robin" style, which is the way Danielewicz (1997) practices letter writing in her undergraduate English class. In my initial

experiments with letter writing in 1997, I had kept group membership fixed. The rationale provided by this student for round robin organization was interesting: "People seem to 'plateau' sometimes." I do remember that several students asked if we were going to keep the same groups for the entire semester. Did these requests signify the presence of latent interpersonal conflicts within several groups, or were these students desirous for new groupings which might transcend the level of analysis attained by some of the existing groups. While I do not know the specific reasoning which prompted these requests, I believe that the plateauing rationale reflected a focus on the intellectual dimension of lettering writing. I did rotate membership of letter writing groups as the spring 1997 semester unfolded, and I assigned somewhat fewer letters in the latter part of the semester.

In the course evaluation at the end of the semester, I inserted several short answer questions which either solicited comment about several of my teaching techniques, including letter writing, or were sufficiently open-ended to permit the discussion of letter writing. Once again students reacted to both the social and intellectual dimensions of letter writing:

> The letter writing was tremendously powerful! I like responding to the reading in this thoughtful way. It was nice to find "kindred spirits."
>
> In both [letter writing and small group discussions not tied to letters], I got to express some thoughts and questions I might not have in the big group. I received great feedback on my ideas.

> I really liked the letter writing activities. They made me think about the reading I was doing so that I could write about it but without the pressure of a paper.

By the end of the course, students seemed to place more emphasis on the intellectual value of letter writing than they had in February. I speculate that the social importance of letter writing tends to decline as the semester progresses and the members of a graduate course come to know one another. In addition, social motives may be fulfilled in alternative ways once a group matures. For example, one enthusiast for letter writing noted: "I have developed some close ties with three other class members, and we've met outside of class in order to continue our conversations and get to know each other better."

Interestingly, only about a quarter of my curriculum theory students mentioned letter writing in the final course evaluation, but all the references were positive. I, therefore, conclude that letter writing can be an intellectually and socially valuable teaching approach for certain students in a graduate class which contains abstract and challenging content and is at least tolerated by all students in such a class situation. Letter Writing in My Curriculum Theory Class (1998).

In the 1997 syllabus, letter writing was identified as an "experiment"; no such qualification was placed on letter writing in the 1998 syllabus. I also made a significant change in how letter writing fit into course evaluation. In 1997, I never really did see the letters which students composed, neither when

they were being written nor at the end of the course. They were an activity which was tangential to the curriculum theory course. For 1998, I decided to more tightly integrate letter writing into the course. While I maintained the practice of not collecting a copy of the letters when they were traded (I continued to want the audience to be peers), I did make the letters part of the portfolio each class member submitted at the conclusion of the course.

Letter writing was employed five times in 1998: January 15 (the second class meeting), January 22 (third class), February 5 (fifth class), March 19 (ninth class), and April 9 (thirteenth class). Early in the semester I used 5 groups of 3 people each and 2 groups of 2 people each; later in the semester I replaced the 2 dyads a 4-person group, since dyads seemed to tire of one another and had shorter and less diverse discussions. On the other hand, more than 3-4 people in a group seems to make it easier for a person or two to opt out of letters-based discussions. As during 1997, I tended in 1998 to use letter writing more in the early part of the semester than at the end; letter writing does seem to foster development of a collegial spirit of inquiry and cooperation in a class.

Typical of the letter assignments was the one for January 22. Each of the 19 graduate students composed a letter to several classmates about chapters 7 through 15 of Clandinin and Connelly's Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes. In this

section of the book, experienced teachers present stories of staff development encounters and describe the first-year teaching done by graduates of an alternative teacher education program. Interspersed with seven chapters of teacher narratives are two interpretative chapters, chapters which are authored by the two editors and are heavily laden with metaphors.

Students typically take quite diverse approaches to letter writing. A second semester student in the Master's of School Administration (MSA) program, Alice[2] used her letter to summarize the ideas in several chapters and to evaluate the accounts of first-year teaching, suggesting, for example, that Benita (a first-year teacher) was not adequately prepared by a preservice program which emphasized journaling and self-awareness: "I would go so far as to say that she was done a great injustice by not being prepared by her teacher education program for the real world." Deborah, a writing partner of Alice and also enrolled in the MSA program, oriented her letter inwardly: "I continued [from the prior letter] to reflect on my personal experiences as a former teacher. I can especially relate to the conflict between out-of-classroom and in-classroom landscapes."

Despite these contrasting orientations, Deborah and Alice both grounded their thinking in their forthcoming careers as school administrators. Deborah observed that "reflection is a key concept visited by the authors.... I feel this idea is worth examining as future administrators. Providing time for faculty

to reflect on the meaning of tasks in an integral part of effective teaching." Deborah seemed to be pondering how she might provide time for teachers to reflect in a school she might lead. Taking a different slant, Alice commented: "The language of her alternative program definitely does not match that of the professional knowledge of the administrators who are in charge of hiring new teachers." Alice seemed to be wondering if Benita should ever have been hired in the first place, a theme which Fred, a third MSA student, echoed: "As I read the story of Benita, I could not help but notice the difference that exists between teacher education programs and what is deemed important by the school systems that hire the teachers."

Another MSA student, Ralph, was even more direct when he asserted that "I don't think I would hire her [Benita] to work at my school.... She seems to not understand that what you learn in college courses (by this I mean theory) is not always what you need in order to be a good teacher." Jane, also a MSA student, started her letter with clear statement that "a number of issues raised by this week's reading, from the perspective of a school administrator, were thought provoking." Jane presented her entire letter as a series of tasks and dilemmas for the school administrator. While these five MSA students approached Benita and related issues from varying angles, all of them used the letters to deliberate on some aspect of their anticipated administrative responsibilities.

Cheryl, however, identified more readily with Benita and decided to "consider issues concerning the landscapes teachers must negotiate." In reviewing Benita's teacher preparation, Cheryl observes that the author mentioned how children themselves contributed to Benita's improved teaching: "As I was reading the story, I was reminded of my own internship where I taught for full time for half a school year. Like Benita, I appealed to the students ... for 'help.'" Making links between her own experience and that of Benita, Cheryl reminisces about her autobiography as a teacher. In the latter part of her letter of January 22, Cheryl uses the low self-confidence of Tim, another first-year teacher, as a vehicle for stepping back from the specific stories in Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes and pondering why "teachers have/appear to have such low self-esteem. It is disturbing for me, as one with a strong personality and a clear understanding of who I am and what I am willing to buy into, to think about these teachers as helpless, or unable to control their situations." Cheryl is in a curriculum and instruction degree program and ultimately plans on becoming a teacher educator with the task of nurturing and preparing teachers comparable to Benita and Tim.

Of the five MSA students quoted earlier, Deborah was the only one who used the opportunity of letter writing to reflect about her life as a teacher. The primary focus of the other four MSA students -- and a secondary focus for Deborah -- was the

significance of the descriptions and interpretations of teachers professional lives for these MSA students' impending positions as school administrators. The pattern of potent impact of professional role on the content and perspective of letter writing is striking, and leads me to consider what factors might account for this heavy degree of influence.

One obvious possibility is that my instructions on letter preparation were ambiguous enough so that each letter writer could bring that person's distinctive perspectives to the task. I do think that a high degree of vagueness characterized my letter writing assignments; my classroom plan for January 15 (the week before the class period which generated these letters) notes only that I assigned letter writing and trading to be done on January 22, and that the discussion of letters on January 15 was to focus on "understanding the perspective of other persons."

However, the storied and metaphoric nature of the writing in the Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes may also have contributed to the propensity of my graduate students to let their own role perspectives assume great importance. One check on this possibility is to analyze letters based on an article which is written in a direct and didactic way. Two weeks later on February 5, students prepared a letter in response to an essay[1] from Breaking Free on the silencing of the women in a graduate seminar by the men in that class, an event which was interpreted by the article's authors as an instance of

patriarchy. Would the focus on a single graduate class which seemed to be a stark example of male domination steer the letters away from the administrators roles with which my MSA students identified?

That seems to be precisely what happened. Fred, a MSA student, kept his letter focused on the issue of patriarchy in the university classroom. He did draw upon personal knowledge when he observed that "I have not noticed women in general taking a back seat to the males in any classes that I have enrolled in here at UNC. In fact, I have noticed the exact opposite." Fred did not, as he had in the discussion of Benita, connect his letter back to public school systems. Ralph, the other male MSA student whom I quoted earlier, also took sharp issue with the patriarchal analysis in the article and, as Fred, restricted his external reference to his experience at UNC, especially our curriculum theory class: "I see our class as being one where anyone, male or female, is able to voice an opinion without being silenced or devalued."

The three female MSA students did not connect their letters to their future administrative responsibilities nearly as much as they had done in the earlier letter. For the February 5 letter, the women tended to think in terms of their personal experience with sexism or consider sexism as a general issue. While Alice granted that she had personally experienced sexism first hand, she found little to fault in the behavior of the men from the

graduate class in the Breaking Free case. Alice concluded that the proper way to deal with sexism is not to withdraw from communication as the women in the case had done, but rather offered this advise to women: "A woman can do anything she sets out to [do] in our society if she is willing to fight for it. 'Fighting for it' doesn't involve withdrawing from difficult situations and complaining about the behavior of others without engaging in an open discussion of her concerns." Jane also argued for the importance of women taking personal responsibility to make themselves be heard: "Where I felt some discomfort was with the notion that somehow others (in this case females) would only find voice in the setting when they were so granted by the dominant males." Neither Jane nor Alice related sexism to their future role as administrators. Only Deborah linked a portion of her discussion back to being a school administrator: "No man entering the field of educational administration would ever be asked if he were tough enough to handle the job."

Thus the use of a single case focused on an emotionally potent issue did seem to reduce the tendency for both the male and female MSA students to appeal to their future administrative role. Instead, they recounted personal experiences and developed personal philosophies in their letters about this case of patriarchy, either to grant its validity or to argue its falsity. Thus, I think that the more emotionally laden the stimulus for a letter, the more personal will be the letters written in

response. In addition, the way I gave the directions for this particular letter may have also reduced the connections drawn to external events and future professional roles. In my email directions for the letter preparation, I said: "Since this essay is a controversial one, I suggest you, at minimum, analyze carefully what the specific thesis(es)of the article are, what arguments Simon and Lewis use to support their thesis(es), and how successful they are in making their case." These directions, if followed, would have directed the attention of letter writing to the internal dynamics of the case and away from such questions as how patriarchy relates to the role of the school administrator.

The "if followed" turns out to be an important proviso, since only one of the five letters composed by a MSA student attempted to deal with my recommended approach for examining the article. After outlining her personal reaction to the essay, Alice, near the end of her letter, said: "Now, to Dr. Tom's assignment...." after which she provided a succinct summary of the main points in the article, and her critical reaction to these points. This part of the letter is very well done, but it seems to be more done in response to my request than integral to remainder of Alice's letter. None of the other MSA students attempted to summarize and dissect the theses in the article.

So, the emotional potency of the essay on which the February 5 letter is based may well have been the overriding consideration

in channeling the responses of students to the specific issues in the essay. In fact, the potency of the patriarchy/sexism issue even appeared to override my suggestion that students sort out the theses and arguments in the article. If the instructor's purpose is to focus on the organization and structure of an essay, then I think a better approach than letter writing is the outlining of an article as part of a small group activity in class.[4]

The evaluations which I conducted at the end of the 1998 curriculum theory course supplied several ideas which could inform my use of letter writing:

> The letter writing forced me to synthesize my ideas about the readings, and the discussions further helped that. I appreciated, though, having some breaks from letter writing.
>
> Letter writing for the first 30 minutes of class (an answer in response to the question of what one aspect of the course should be kept the way it was this year).
>
> The letters made me really process the readings, and it was great to share in small groups and bounce ideas off each other.

As in the case of 1997, the 1998 references to letter writing were all positive. However, letter writing was mentioned more than twice as often in 1998 final evaluations as it had been in 1997, even though the two versions of the course evaluation were very similar and letter writing was mentioned each year in only one question (as one of several options which a student might select as one of the two most valuable class activities).

Besides the increased frequency with which letter writing

was mentioned in 1998, the most striking difference in the two final course evaluations was the lessened emphasis in 1998 on what I have called the social dimension of letter writing (e.g., wanting to share ideas, finding people with congruent ideas, and so forth). Several factors may account for this development. In 1998, there was greater ideological tension within the class than had been the case in 1997, and the diversity of student body increased in other ways in 1998. That year about half of the students came from the MSA program, while during the prior year only one student was a MSA candidate. In addition, the class membership changed from being largely doctoral students in 1997 to being roughly split between master's and doctoral students in 1998. As a result, I am not surprised that the social motivation was somewhat lessened in 1998, but at the same time letter writing was viewed even more strongly in 1998 as a means for sorting out ideas and fostering reflection on these ideas.

Reflections on Letter Writing

Before pulling together my reflections on the use of letter writing, I want to emphasize that the letters which my students prepared are not as choppy as the excerpts from them may make them appear. The typical letter is between 1 and 3 doublespaced pages in length (I am continuing the use of letters in 1999 curriculum theory class), and the author typically develops several lines of related argument. Depending on the essay/chapters being addressed and the potency of an issue,

students may either get deeply involved in their personal ideas and perceptions or try to connect their thinking to some external point of reference such as an anticipated future role. I am commonly feel that letter writing opens a window into student thinking which other teaching approaches rarely provide. One question which I am investigating this semester is whether collecting letters as they are written will reduce the extent to which my experienced teachers will share their personal thinking with me.

To pull together my reflections on letter writing, I identify a set of pedagogical decisions about the use of letters and the related considerations which go into making those decisions:

> The timing of trading letters. In the 1998 course evaluation, one student commented that starting class with 30 minutes of trading and discussing letters was a good idea. Its true that this process can jump-start a class, an effect of some significance when teaching a 3-hour 4:00 p.m. class to students who themselves may have been teaching all day. However, I am now experimenting with the trading of letters after the mid-class break, particularly since the MSA students these past two years have had two long classes on the day they take my curriculum theory course. Sometimes the jump start seems especially important for the last half of my late afternoon course.
>
> The size of letter groups. As I mentioned earlier, groupings of 3-4 students seem to work best. This size achieves variety in ideas while maintaining the opportunity for each group member to participate in group discussion. A group of 3 seems better than a group of 4 -- its harder for a student to opt out (or be squeezed out) of a 3-way than a 4-way discussion. Be careful about concurrently using groupings of several different sizes; groupings of 2, for example, will finish their discussions of letters much faster than do groupings of 3 and 4.

Switching group membership. The plateauing effect of group discussion does seem to occur after a group has been together for 2-3 letters; monitoring group discussion is the best way to assess when reorganizing groups is needed to bring a new vitality into the discussions of letters. When I do shuffle the memberships of groups, I try to make sure that each group is composed of people who have not been clustered together in the past.

Frequency of using letter writing. This activity seems ideally suited to establishing a sense of collegiality in a class, both among the students and between the students and the instructor. So I have tended to start my curriculum theory course with several letter trading events within the first several weeks. Then, I tend to back off, being careful to preserve some of the novelty of letter writing for later in the course. The power of a sound teaching strategy is more likely to be maintained if breaks in its use are judiciously inserted in a course.

Selecting the article for letter writing. This decision, as suggested earlier, is complex and depends on several considerations, including whether the purpose is to have students explore their ideas in some detail or whether the purpose is to have students connect their thinking to factors outside the essay. A case can be made for introducing controversial material into a class through the mechanism of letter writing, since small group discussion of a topic does provide a more sheltered and contained environment than does full-class discussion.

Framing the letter assignment. My tendency has been to leave the task for a letter assignment be relatively openended, partly because I did not know the extent to which a tight framing might clash with the possibility of writing a personally meaningful letter. When I have tried to tighten the framing, students do not necessarily follow my directions, possibly because letters are by tradition a self-directed activity but also, I believe, because letter writing seems at times to assume a dynamic which is not controllable by the instructor. Achieving voice may best be done under conditions of low direction, especially since focus can be introduced by the instructor later through a large group discussion.

These six pedagogical decisions are not the only ones faced by the instructor who employs letter writing, but they have proven to be salient in my use of letter writing in a curriculum theory

class.

Conclusion

I am still trying to understand the reasons why letter writing seems to be such an effective teaching approach. As I noted earlier, letter writing is a well-established and often popular activity. Letter writing is usually much more appealing than traditional journal writing in that letters establish an audience and engender response. Letter writing also appeals to the old teacher idea that having to explain something to someone else is a powerful form of learning.

Letter writing may be particularly useful for areas of study similar to curriculum theory. The topics of contemporary curriculum theory seem far removed from the public school classroom, including such esoteric ideas as post-modernism. Curriculum theory also raises deeply normative issues, as in the case of critical pedagogy or feminist theory, both of which challenge many current educational practices. For some experienced teachers, moreover, the abstractness of contemporary curriculum theory presents problems of understanding, while other teachers see the critical perspectives of contemporary curriculum theory as being in conflict with the realities of teacher accountability measured by student test scores.

In closing, let me quote from an email by Cheryl when she found out I was preparing this paper:

> I am glad you are examining letters as a form of engagement. They were so great personally! I would attest to that. A

letter to "you the professor" would have been a very different animal that these letters to our peers.

Perhaps I have looked too hard for the "secret" of letter writing, while its power comes from the simple idea that students often learn much more from each other than from the professor.

Endnotes

1. Most of the experienced teachers taking my curriculum theory class actually are studying for a role which will take them out of the classroom. Many are planning to become professors of education, some want to hold central office positions in K-12 public school systems, and others plan to become public school principals and/or superintendents.

2. All names are pseudonyms, and authors of the letters have given me permission to quote from their letters. Occasionally, I have dropped a word or two from a letter or inserted a referent, but these changes do not alter the meaning of a letter. I did not use letters from students who currently are taking the curriculum theory course (spring 1999).

3. The essay is "A Discourse Not Intended for Her: Learning and Teaching within Patriarchy" by Magda Lewis and Roger I. Simon.

4. Recently, I employed an outlining approach for a complex essay in Breaking Free -- Cameron McCarthy's "Rethinking Liberal and Radical Perspectives on Racial Inequality in Schooling: Making the Case for Nonsynchrony." I broke the class into groups of three and gave each group the same task: outline the main points and supporting arguments in McCarthy's essay. After about 40 minutes of discussion -- the students had read the essay before class -- each group put its outline of the article on newsprint, posted the results on the wall, and examined the outlines of the other groups. This activity both helped the class members assess the structure of McCarthy's essay and showed each group its outline in comparison to the outlines of other groups.

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